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Tumbleweed

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TUMBLEWEED.

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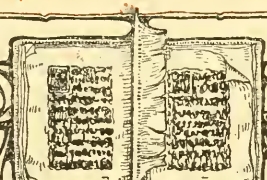
Tumbleweed

H. Rea Woodman



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As I used to bring my verses to you when I was a little girl, to whom else should I turn now, dear father? With the same joyous love, and confidence in your sympathy, I bring you these vagrants from the prairies you loved with all the passion of your poet-mind. In reverence and gratitude and longing I write upon this page the supremest name to me, the name of the richest-hearted man I have known, my father, William Clayton Woodman.

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THE TUMBLEWEED.

Where do they come from,
The Tumbleweed?
Where do they go to,
The Tumbleweed?
Who knows whence is their life so free,
Born on the prairies' shadowless sea?
Who knows of the parents they boast,
This tossing, fringéd, homeless host?
Who knows where they bury their dead
When the winds' high requiem is said?—
Vagrants alway,
The Tumbleweed!

Where do they come from,
The Tumbleweed?
Where do they go to,
The Tumbleweed?
Ask of the breezes that sigh and fall;
Ask of the winds that shriek and call;
Ask of the changing lights that pass
Over the wheat, the corn, the grass;
Ask of the rose-gray mists that creep
Like mother-watch o'er the prairies' sleep,—
Vagrants alway,
The Tumbleweed!

Where do they come from,
The Tumbleweed?
Where do they go to,
The Tumbleweed?

Suddenly at your feet they lie,
Laughing, tumbling, go rolling by;
Over the blue-bound prairies leap,
No faith, no love, no tryst they keep;
Free and wild is the will they boast,
This tossing, fringéd, homeless host,—
Vagrants alway,
The Tumbleweed!

LAKESIDE.

Dear Sweetheart of old, loved in the fair days
When life was as fresh as a bright new toy
Made for just you and me, Dear, girl and boy,
Strong in our boast of the many bold ways
We'd conquer the world that lay in a haze
Of splendid tangle before us. No joy
But we would reach it; no evil alloy
But what, at our valor, would stand at gaze!
Let me come back to you, Sweetheart of old;
Let us play the years have been only hours;
That we parted last night at the pasture gate...
I hear your feet in the fallen leaves' gold;
No horrible surfeit skulks and glowers...
I knock at your heart, Boy! I wait—I wait!

"GREEN'S GITTIN' ON IN THE WORLD."

"Superintindint Green,"
"Superintindint Green,"
He's a very great man,—
He admits it himself,—
And what he loves most
Is power and pelf,
"Superintindint Green,"

He sits in an elegant office
Where softened lights rest and fall;
On the floors are squares of rich carpet,
And bits of framed dreams on the wall;
If he wants any human service
He has but to lift his white hand;
He rules like a god from Olympus,
Self-contained, trumpet-voiced and grand.

His captains rail and swear very loud
At the bending men and women;
He rents flesh and blood at lowest rates,
This pawn-broker in the human;
He's buying lands and houses, I'm told,
Fast horses and diamonds and such,
But the man and woman who work for him
Lift their sad hearts not over much.

Timid and silent they "work" all day,
And go home when the night shuts down;
Their laughter is hushed in his thunder,
Their gaity dies in his frown;

His doléd gold means dear life to them,
  These powerless men and women,
Though he rents their flesh at lowest rates,
  This pawn-broker in the human.

"Superintindint Green,"
  "Superintindint Green,"
You're a very great man,
  But does God think so, too?
Ah, what will He say
  When He hears about you,
  "Superintindint Green?"

A BIRTHDAY.

The sun has shone the live-long day;
  The postman has come three times, and gone
Down the long street his zigzag way;
  My violets are put on the ledge
Of the window in the fresh air;
  The darkness lingers on the edge
Of midnight. . . It's been my birthday,
  And you, Sister, have not said a word.
The postman has gone his zigzag way
  Down the long street three times, and I—
I have kissed again and again
  Your letters of birthdays gone by.

THE PALMS.

I.

The navéd arch was brilliant with bloom;
("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")
Fair women knelt 'mid the lilies white,
As virgin as they in Beauty's sight;
Roses altared high each saint and shrine,
And Fashion gazed while God was made wine;
("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")

Into the blare of the Easter space
("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")
A Stranger stepped, and stood alone
'Neath a graven Christ on a column stone;
Stood unnoticed in shadow and cold,
'Neath the graven Christ, centuries old;
("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")

And the Stranger mused, as the people passed;
("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")
"Can this be I in the shadow drear,
No hand held out to me here—even here?
Why, I dreamed once that I never would be
Despised again. Did men not *see*...?"
("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")

II.

The next day the Stranger stood alone
Before a cathedral of piléd stone;
The low-browed door, repellant, staring
Without passion, without hasting, out into
The April sunshine;

From the vast and lacéd towers
  Swallows twittered in their bowers,
And a great cross, rigid, eyeless, silent,
  Held its gray face up to heaven, softened
    By the April sunshine.

From the lambent light the Stranger stepped
  Into a thick, solemn gloaming, where wept
A carvéd Christ, gaunt, ghast and gray, falling
  Forward everlasting from his cross
    Of fretted stone;
Above the Christ's head a star burned low,
  At his feet a marble woman-woe,
Mary, sitting silent, sitting lonely,
  Pointing with eternal sorrow to her heart
    Of piercéd stone.

And the Stranger said, as he gained the street;
  ("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")
Can it be I on that cross of stone,
  Dying alone in the gloom—*alone?*
Why, I dreamed once that I never would be
Left alone again. Did men not *see*...?
  ("He comes! He comes! All hail, auspicious day!")

III.

And the town never knew that Jesus passed through
  In the same old lonesome, shelterless way.

APRIL NINETEENTH.

"The burial facilities are totally inadequate." Press Dispatch.

She is the woefullest city
  That e'er the sun rose on, blood-red;
The woeful and beautiful city,
  She cannot bury her dead.

Far to the west the bright sea dimples,
  And the shine of April is wide;
At her feet her broken and charréd dead
  Lie close packed, side by side;
She is the woefullest city
  That ever flames mocked at, blood-red;
The woeful and beautiful city,
  She cannot bury her dead.

At her side her hands hang empty,
  Nor shovel nor pick nor shroud;
In her hushéd eyes a thousand griefs
  Tremble and struggle and crowd;
O woeful and beautiful city,
  See, see, the sun sets, rose-red,
And we come with linen and spice,
  We come to bury your dead.

"OH, THAT'S ALL OFF!"

Hurt? Of course he was hurt,
His delicate love-wings maimed for life;
She? What's an incident
In a coquette's brilliant and crowded life?
He drags broken pinions
In the lowest and saddest places;
Her low cunning he sees
In the clearest of woman faces.
Maybe she does not know—
Guess—the breadth of her wreck and despoil,
But the slime of her trail
Reeks loud in a world of honest moil.

A FORGIVENESS.

So you killed the little bird, Kitty Cat?
I'm very, very much grieved to hear that;
And you're in dreadful disgrace this morning;
Everybody around here is quite through
With "that wretched cat." Your New Year's dawning
Bleak and lonesome, Kitty Cat,
Do you realize that?

In his own little way the bird lived brave
Behind the gold bars the sun glinted through,
And now,—the children are making his grave
Under the snow...
A bird's grave, Kitty Cat,
Try to think just of that!

You see, one can't have much fun
Behind gold bars, though they shine in the sun;
All the green's outside. You surely can see
What a queer, one-sided life it must be
In a cage. Why, I think I should—
There, I'll tie up the curtain string;
It isn't fair for you to be playing
While the funeral is going on
Out there in the snow. O Kitty Cat,
Please don't purr like that!

Don't you feel sorry at all
When you think of it all, Kitty Cat,—
The tiny body in the wide cold out there
And no more music in this big house?
And yet...Kitty Cat, I forgive you that,

For once, I remember, long ago
Another grave was made under the snow,
And my sister said, "But he didn't mean
To *kill* the bird. It's his nature;
He doesn't know any better, poor thing,—
Poor little thing, Ze Lion, Ze Big Cat!"
For her sake...thinking of a grave
Over which the magnolias weep tears white as snow,
I forgive you that, Kitty Cat, Kitty Cat,—
I forgive you the grave under the snow.

"UNTO ALL THEIR DUE."

Not for mercy I pray the Judge
  Wherever His Bench may be;
I ask for justice, keen, concise,
  The justice coming to me.

What I have done the Judge will know
  If his eyes all-seeing be;
He's bound to grant me the honor due,
  The justice coming to me.

No fire will scorch, no crown delight
  If His heart all-noble be;
He'll stand up like a man and mete
  The justice coming to me.

It may burn deeper than fire,
  As a hearted Judge can see;
But He's no right to tamper with
  The justice coming to me.

If the gods saw fit to let me live
  In a world they still let be,
They owe me, straight, without excuse,
  The justice coming to me.

No gods worth while will deny me this,
  "Whatever gods may be,"
To let my pride, unbroken, bear
  The justice coming to me.

THE THREE LIGHTS.

God had a thought in the common daylight,—
Man;
He had a dream in the violet twilight,—
Woman;
He fared Him forth in the ghostly moonlight,
And named them,—Human.

WHEN WE SWEAR TEDDY IN.

The shouts flare loud,
The street is a-crowd,
With the music and the shouting and the palms!
The street is a-crowd
Of full hearts meek and proud,
Beneath the thousands of crimson-barred balms!
In the splendid flare and din
Failure yet has never been,
The world is ours to win
When we swear Teddy in!

The tramp of feet
Down the noble street,
With the music and the shouting and—the tears!
Down the noble street
High faiths and wishes meet,
Our soldiers, sailors, statesmen without peers!
Glory we have entered in,
Honor we are centered in,
The world is fair to win
When we swear Teddy in!

Our hearts swell high
As the men sweep by,
With the music and the shouting and the flags!
As the men sweep by
We almost ask to die
Before our passion of gratitude lags!
Self and gold and gain are thin,
We forget our hate and sin,
Our world all right can win
When we swear Teddy in!

AT MY WINDOW.

A skit of rain in the street outside,
  A dove's low brooding from somewhere;
The smell of fresh earth and grass;
  Children's voices in the playground there,
Where the tall houses tower above it...
  The sun again; it was only in fun,
As the children knew, nor counted the day,
  Like the poor dove, darkening and done;
A hurdy-gurdy grinding a hymn;
  A stylish carriage before number nine;
An exquisite child with its broad black nurse,—
  Their world,—their world,—and—and mine;
Our world, our brave new world called "April"...
  The smell of fresh earth and grass...
Yet to know the world she knows to-day,
  Who would not let this world pass?

TO OMAR.

Omar, I'm very fond of your singing,
You rare, you benighted old Persian!
You set my fancy careening and winging
With your radiant, wholesale aspersion,—
Your scorn in those far-shining lines which set
One's heart to blooming in tangled regret
That there's aught on earth but your pleasure cup
Entwined with opaline leaves of the vine,
Encrowned with beautiful crystalline wine,
Of life's crimson height the pledge and the sign,
O Omar, rare heart, your wine and your vine!
When I read—and forget—they are all, all mine,
White breasts, red lips and the crystalline wine,
I am drunk with bliss on the Persian sands,—
I hold the crushed pulse of men's joy in my hands!

Omar, fond as I am of your singing,
You delicious, you defiant old Persian!
I return in silence from the sands, bringing
No crimson or wine for the world's conversion.
The sickening swirl of the mad blood steadies,
The beating air dies in circling eddies,
A thin grey mist trails after the sunken sun...
I stand in the mart where ten thousand men,
Baffled and beaten again and again,
Bruised and broken in temple and den,—
O courage, rare hearts, to the high time, when
Whiteness and quiet shall become all men,
And we rise to just decent manhood again!
I return no more to the Persian sands,—
I hold the weighed worth of men's strife in my hands!

THE FIRST EASTER.

It was a rose I found on the street,
  So crushed that I thought it dead;
I laid to my cheek its wanness sweet;
  I loved it for its lost red.

But the rose's heart said to my heart,
  "Your grief, dear, tell it to me."
And my heart said to the rose's heart,
  "It is dead, dear, dead. Let be."

I know that grief always knows her dead
  And answers or where or when;
But O, the wonder! The red rose said,
  "The dead, dear, they rise again.

"I thought me dead on the pavement there,
  Then you laid me to your face;
I felt the warmth of your eyes and hair,—
  See, I breathe in Easter space!"

TWO WIVES.

The town was roused to the horror of it;
  Populace and press declared the man not fit
To be called human. The story she told,
  The poor broken wife, her child six years old
At her side, scarred by the merciless blows,
  Was bruited abroad, as the wild wind goes
In every crevice.
                In her room alone,
  A beautiful woman read through the case,
Rose, went to the window, parted the lace
  Whose delicate meshes caught the sunlight
In tiny tangles of pale silken glare,—
  Too rude its pure strength for the lady there;
                A pampered lady, she.

Unseeing, she looked out upon her world
  That still slept, though the sun had unfurled
His glory six hours before. Her lips
  Were locked hard, as when thin bitterness drips
From something made long ago to be sweet.
  Unseeing, her eyes wandered to the street
Sacred to riches.
                And she said, aloud,
"He beat *her* with his hands,—struck and kicked her;
Here at this end of the street, we prefer
  To strike with the tongue. I bear no bruises,
But I've been struck and struck till my heart is dead.
  Not all blows stain the flesh," the lady said,
                And turned from the window.

And the world outside, whose judgments are sure,
  Envied the lady, and pitied "that poor
Abused woman," cursing the wretch who beat
  Her body. And in an elegant suite
Of club rooms a man lolled at ease that day,
  Smoking and boasting the hours away,
A gentleman.
  And in the public ward
  Fanny Smith's maimed body lay soothed, embalmed
In soft, wet things, like an anguish becalmed
  In God's silence. And in a prison cell
A man crouched and cursed, his foul, fear-rid eyes
  Agape at hell with a fool's wide surprise;
    Is God in His heaven?
    Is all *right* with His world?

I AM FREE!

I am free! I am free! I stretch wide hands
To the laughing, mad-cap winds; I enfold
All prisoned things, crouchant, wretched and cold
In my new warm life. I would loose their bands,
Give them crimson, kisses, fame, riches, lands!
I'd give them liberty, splendid as light,
Sweet as water to desert thirst, the sight
Of distant green blur on the blazing sands!
No more angry words that cut keen like steel;
No jealous, dim doubts that sicken the mind
And toss it like foam on a maddened sea;
No more stupid, half-despised efforts to feel
The old passion surge, resistless and blind;
I am free, free, free! Dear God, I am free!

Her relations all looked upon her
  As she turned, "A Failure," at bay;
And they lifted arch brows upon her,
  And spoke out their minds, had their say;
Her brother said, "You've always been queer;
  Why not stay home as a woman ought?
Self-support for a woman is sheer,
  Rank nonsense. Well, you know what *I* thought!"
And her mother said, with lips compressed,
  "Let it be a lesson this time;
Come home now and stay with the rest;
  I shall not give you another dime
To waste on Art." And her aunt said,
  Fanning wide with a big feather fan,
"If you just *could* get it through your head
  That the best thing is a good man
To take care of you. That's a woman's part."

Then they all sighed and looked at the floor,
  Stirred in their chairs and glanced at each other,
Looked at the floor and sighed some more,
  Then said her oldest and biggest brother,
Lighting a cigar as he sized her up;
  "Well, you have made your trial, had your will;
It's a failure. You'd better give up,
  And settle down and keep still;
Get married like other girls. What's the use
  Trying to do what you can't? We know
What's best for you. Don't be a goose."

And her sister said, watching the baby go
From chair to chair, "If you really had
Genius, dear, it would be all right;
But as you haven't it makes us sad
To see you work so. Be happy and bright
In the home. That's a woman's place."

And her father said—but he was dead,
And so didn't "say" with the rest that day:
But that night in her desolate bed
She whispered, "Father, what do *you* say?"
And her father said, "My daughter, I see
How alone you stand in your trying
To live up to what you have power to be.
It's hard enough for a man in the lying,
Selfish world you're in, but for a woman—
O my daughter, I understand now,
That the supremest and hardest human
Lot is that of a woman upon whose brow
Genius is written. Go your sad way
Alone if need be. I offer no rest,
No comfort, my child. I would not delay
The high fruitage your life must attest."
Then, like a child tired with play, she slept.

"NOT A SPARROW FALLETH."

There is not a cloud in the blue; no sound
From the sun-drenched sky to the prostrate ground;
The grasses, erect, all-sentinel, stand
Listening the pulse of the summer-drowned land;
It is all so still that I lie here afraid,
Aghast at the beating my heart has made
Against the stillness...Suppose, Dear Heart,
This still world were you, I would choose the part
Of a wandering bird in the realms of blue,
A cared-for atom of Infinite You!

MY POET.

The sweetest sweetheart, I ever had—
(Forgive what's implied; comparison's bad!)
Was a round-eyed, freckled-cheeked, bashful lad,
Or small boy rather;
The years together
He had been from heaven
Were only seven.

He came to me one bleak March day,—
The snow had only but melted away,—
A day when my heart went low and gray;
He came and stood still,
Smiling slow, until
I guessed in which hand;
"Money? Candy? Land?"

Slowly he opened his shut-up fist;
My hot eyes cooled with a grateful mist;
It was a poet's gift, I wist!
Some blades of grass, five,
Threads of green, alive,
Tiny, tender, fresh
As the dew-drop's mesh!

My little poet! My sweetheart rare,
Listen. I've never had a gift so fair
As those grass blades brought to my door-step there;
Across the wide years
Can you feel my tears
As you breathe deep rest
On God's home-breast?

AN APPRECIATION.

An incident recorded by Matthew in the twenty-first chapter of his biography of Jesus.

The sea of the Eastern night around them,
A man and woman waited the Word
  That quickens all silence to life;
Waited, knowing it could not be said,—
Knowing that he could never be husband,
  And she would never be wife;
The morning's shouting was ages agone,
The palms faded in far Jerusalem,
  In this dark the human was all;
Through the midnight's myriad mystic murmur
The man descerned no diviner voice
  Than the voice of her womanhood call;
But he made no answer, nor raised his eyes,
And they listened Love's garments trail by,
  The All-Word denied that is Life;
Heard the rustle die in the saddened gloom,
Knowing that he could never be husband,
  And she would never be wife.

The night wore to morn in its own good time,
And his day's duty lay mapped before him,—
  His man's work in the world of men,
His work in the city where palms were strewed
But yesterday! Unremembering, he turned
  His face to the city again.
Had he ridden slow 'neath the bending green,
While the children went singing before,
  And harkened hozannas ring?—

Had he indeed conquered the city's pride
And heard himself in her proudest streets
  Acclaimed by the people as "KING!"
But yesterday? Now a midnight's silence
Drowned the brave singing and dimmed the praise;
  And so the man, whose heart went sad,
Stepped into the glow of the Eastern dawning
And walked down a country road he knew
  Toward Jerusalem, hoar and bad.

And as the man walked he saw a fig tree
Standing all bright in the crimson morning,
  Its sworded leaves refreshed with dew;
But barren it stood in a world of fruit,
The first childless thing he seemed to have seen
  The length of that April through;
Across his fancy a woman's face smiled...
She bent her head o'er his babe at her breast,—
  He felt her new eyes bless him...
The garden's silence rose tall and stark,
Swift and direct and full it struck out,
  Blow upon blow did it press him;
The unborn Word grew big in his heart
Till its walls stretched pallid and taut and thin,
  Then leapt in birth-agony:
"I curse you! You mock me, you barren thing!
Henceforth forever you shall bear no fruit!
  I curse you! You mock at me!"

A MINOR TRAGEDY.

They thought they were poor, and I guess they were;
He worked for seventy-five dollars per;
Their one little baby wore gingham slips,
But they laughed, and gazed at the far-off ships!

On Christmas morning he gave to his wife,
With faint, tender thoughts of their courtship life,
A five pound box of Huyler's in pale blue,
Ribbons, laced papers and silver tongs, too.

She peeped, gave a gasp, and tried brave to smile,
Then sobbed and sobbed and sobbed an endless while;
He stood aside for the Comic Muse to pass,
And she cried and cried, and it was Christmas.

THE SURE ROAD.

After I've driven a pen all day,
  Turning words this way and that a-way,
Making them stand up bold and say
  The thing that's been in my heart alway,
I'll tell you what I like to do best
  When I'm newly washed and combed and dressed;
I like to walk quick through the winter dark,
  Purple and fresh, to the little bread shop
Corner Third and the Avenue.

That dear little old bread shop!
  A hip-hip-hurrah place, crowded and bright,
With enough bread and cakes and pies in sight
  To founder an army, 'pears like! And right
And left, heaped and piled, all gaily bedight,
  Candies and cookies and gimcracks galore!
Why, the candy boxes are on the floor
  Stacked high as your head! It's like walking along
A candy street where cookie men throng
  And the pavement is caramels!
And from the high and dingy ceiling,—
  To look at it gives one a wavy feeling!—
Hang frizzly fringes of tissue papers
  Dotted with dead and mummified flies
Who years ago cut their last capers!
  It's a close and stuffy and pell-mell place,
And I tell you what but it does smell queer
  When you come in fresh from the new out-doors!

I sit down at a little round table,
  Beckon the boy,—who is active and sable,—
To bring me my supper soon's he's able,
  (His duties are legion and variable,)

And after awhile he rushes in
  Preceded by a tray of black tin
Whereon two fried eggs turned over repose,
  And a slice of ham 'twixt the plate and those
Aforesaid eggs, and a tall thick tumbler
  (No great poet's taste could be humbler!)
Of milk with tiny ice floes on the top,
  And a moist, warm, gold-brown loaf, and I chop
Off the white velvet slices—Gosh, it's good
  'Bout five thirty on a winter evenin'
After I've driven a pen all day!

And I think I am IT as I chew and chew,
  For this is what all great writers do;
Pinch, skimp and worry their starved lives through,
  Live a day on a cent, a farthing, a sou!
As I feed...and dream!...I seem to see
  A crowd of people; they're talking of Me
And standing in front of an old bread shop
  Before which the big autos always stop;
And tender and soft comes a Tourist's voice,—
  (In Hades 'twill make my heart rejoice!)
"Poor thing, many a time she was hungry here!"
  What is this on my last bite of bread—a tear?
I wipe it away with my paper napkin,
  Pay my bill, walk home brisk through the purple dark,
And resume my pen driving.

TWO WORLDS.

The world is asleep; the far bright stars keep
  Their silence, cold, apart;
I stand in the night. Is our love wrong or right,
  Dear Heart, Dear Heart...Dear Heart?

The world is awake; the high voices make
  Their clamor, loud, apart;
I stand in the day. Our love has no way,
  Dear Heart, Dear Heart...Dear Heart!

REAL ENJOYMENT.

Down to the new deepo
Is the place for to go;
Whistling, tooting, ringing bells,
Holes and shafts and banks and wells,
Big steam shovels swinging high,
Bob-tail dirt trains jerking by;
Piles of stone and iron and brick,
'Talians, niggers, Paddies, "thick
As hasty pudding" everywhere,
On the ground and in the air,
An' sloshing 'round in the yellow mud;
Thwack and slap and squeak and thud;
Ugly black frame 'bove it all,
One side covered, white and tall;—
Oh, it's just perfectly gran'
To stan' and stan' and stan'
And hear 'em yell, "Back there! Now, whoa!"
And watch 'em build the new deepo!

Down to the new deepo
Is the place for to go;
It's a tremenjus idee
That all this hubbub 'll be
A palace, spacious and white
With trains rushing out of sight
In and out, a thousand ways,
All order, splendor and blaze,
This big noisy crazy quilt,
Where mud and stones are dumped and spilt;

Men, horses, engines, tiles, trains, mixed;
Nothing finished, whole, nor fixed;
Oh, it's just perfectly fine
To stan' in the long line
Of loafers and toughs and bums
And watch while the new deepo comes
Into stately life
From the shout and strife!

PERHAPS, TOM.

Tom, to-night, as in silence we sat
Or talked of the people we'd met,
Flirted with, loved and forgotten;

The people we'd known and laughed at,
The fountain of pleasure we'd quaffed at,
The changes of four pleasant years;

Perhaps, 'mid our laughter and sadness,
If any brief thought of the madness
That once flamed in heart and brain;

If any fair vision came to us,
From the past to charm us and woo us,
And make us forget the years between;

If a vague regret, unformed, unsaid,
A longing as for one long dead,
A hope forgotten, a thought unshaped;

Came to you, to-night, as we sat there,
Perhaps, Tom, in those days we *did* care,
For the same regret came to me,

And lay on my heart like a shadow of pain;
But I only laughed...and again
We talked of the people we'd met.

You went away in an hour or two,
Back to the world to work, suffer and woo,
And I — I read Ibsen an hour!

MINNIE ADELAIDE ANGELINE.

Her face was as flat as a copy-book;
  Her nose a red little freckled pot hook;
In two wirey braids her thin hair was bound,
  And tightly and firmly wound 'round and 'round
With yards and yards and yards of white twine,
  That queer little, quaint little seat-mate of mine,
    Minnie Adelaide Angeline.

She teetered along with her head thrown back,
  And carried her books in a fat green sack;
Her gog'ofee, covered with calico blue,
  'Rithmetic, grammar, Reed's Speller, too,—
Deep, dead, indigo blue, in dismal state,
  My queer little, quaint little old seat-mate!

Her dresses were cut cross-ways of the goods;
  She wore the perkiest, squeezed little hoods;
She never ate apples behind her gog'ofee,
  Never chewed tar, nor missed in orthography;
Just grubbed at the calico books all the time,—
  That queer little, quaint little seat-mate of mine.

When in a white squall, the teacher cried, "Who?"
  She'd peek 'round the edge of the calico blue,
And two wirey braids would stand stalk in the air,
  So profound and unconscious and candid her scare!
While the teacher seized *me,* with words irate,
  Not my queer little, quaint little old seat-mate!

Something in her skimped, prim, cross-ways style,
  Her care for her books, or her flat, far smile,
God saw that He liked and wanted close;
  I wonder if There her hair is loose
Or wound 'round and 'round with yards of white twine,
  That queer little, quaint little seat-mate of mine,
    Minnie Adelaide Angeline.

THE UNKNOWN.

As long ago in that Greek city fair,—
The queen-bride was that proud and gracious town,
With pearls and ribbons and lilies all down
The waves of her hair, her radiant hair,
A queen who saw beauty everywhere,
Dreamed it, enmarbled it day after day,
Beauty her barter, her prayer and her play,—
As, dreaming a strength that she did not dare
Ascribe to the gods she knew, that city
Carved a high stone; "To the Unknown God,"
So I have dreamed of a feeling above
All I have known, and in sadness and pity,
Conceiving a love not born of the sod,
I carve a high stone; "To the Unknown Love."

ALL DAY.

All day the air has been warm with Spring,
Dimpling and moist, a tender thing
Aroused to a day of laughter;
And all day long in the house my pen
Has written words on white paper, when
I knew Spring was laughing outside!
I barred it fast, the joy that beat
Against my window, strong and sweet,
And tried to barricade April!

But alas for my work, thoughts of you
Kept creeping through the chinks of blue,
Of you, dear, and April together!
My faithful pen was tracing words,
My heart was listening the blue birds
Building nests in the budding grape vines;
You were watching the birds, and Spring
Dimpled around you, a tender thing
Aroused to a day of laughter!

And I was jealous and sick afraid
Lest you'd love Spring best, the wanton maid,
Pranked out in her gauzes and gold!
There I had to work and leave you two
Idling in the exquisite blue
You and that beautiful wanton!
My heart was sad as my pen drove fast...
O memories, how they cling and clasp!
O Love, that far April together!

ENVOY.

How will you know that it's you I mean
If ever your eyes glance this over?
You'll know it by the beautiful sign,
E'en the sign of the sweet red clover!

IF MY HALTING PEN LEAVES ONE TRACE.

If my halting pen leaves one faintest trace
  On pallid Time's shifting and desert face;
If my heart breeds one word that finds its mate
  In some human life now insensate;
If, somewhere, sometime, a heart beats to mine
  Long "dead," absorbed in the all-life, a sign
Pulsing brief power in wave, cloud or rose;—
  If straight to the center of tears it goes,
That savéd word, I can loosen my hold,
  And sink down, down in the infinite cold,
"A brother to the insensible clod,"
  Down, down in the cold...the cold—oh, my God,
Forgive the boast! Naked, aroused, my fear
  Stands paralyzed, dreaming that dread chill here!

"THEM BROWNS."

Sister, my own, do you mind the Browns,
The Browns, brave and Dutch,
Who lived north of us,
Our goings up and their coming downs!
Do you mind how Katie'd go to school
'Bout eight o'clock,
'Fraid's death to be late?
How she'd sit by the pump on that stool
We hooked from little Ben Munger's dad
To practice hanging Joe with?
We'd ask Otie 'bout Katie,
And he'd promptly chirp up, Dutch and glad,
"Who? Katie? Oh, her—she's went a-ready!"
And Katie would wait and wait,
Nose as blue as a bottle,—
But that was Katie, always so heady!

And when we'd have big bonfires at night,
And roast potatoes and corn,
Otie and Katie would come,—
The Browns never *could* resist a light!—
Swearing they could stay half an hour;
Then Louie would come for them,
And we'd roast more potatoes;
Then Minnie would come, the family flower,
For Louie and Otie and Katie,
And we'd roast some more corn,
Then Billie would come
For Minnie and Louie and Otie
And Katie, and he'd stay just to see!
Then Freddie would come
For Billie and Minnie
And Louie and Otie and Katie!

When, biff, like a thousand of Milwaukee brick,
Blatant Barney himself
Would come after them all,
Saying loud Dutch things with a stick!
Then Billie and Freddie and Minnie
And Otie and Louie
And Katie,—what a push!—
Reluctant, yet agile, would go willy nilly!
And "Susan" would bark, splitting the dark
Into shivering streaks!
Who named him "Susan,"
The lumberous dog with the thunderous bark?
And where are they scattered, "Them Browns," *our* Browns,
Minnie and Louie
And Otie and Katie,
And Freddie and Billie, "them Browns," our Browns!

SUMMUM BONUM.

Do you kuow what I'd rather have
  Than anything else I think of now?
Roses? No thank you, they wither;
  Riches? They fly,—that's all bow wow!
Lovers? Well...well, no, they flutter so;
  From flower to flower they like to flit;
Friends? I have 'em and for any more
  I wouldn't give Fortune a fillip!
Power? It withers in the King's hands,
  Nor saves from sickness and heartbreak;
Fame? It's a bubble very soon burst;
  Genius? It only keeps one awake!
Let those who care for these step up briskly;
  The Devil's booth's open till 10 P. M.,
His charges reasonable; I don't buy
  Because I've known people who've bought 'em!
The thing I want most,—that is, right now,
  And rarer than these I think you'll vote it;—
I want to see my stuff in type
  Printed the way I wrote it!

THE LEISURE SEX.

"We may fairly be said to have a leisure sex."
—The Saturday's Times.

Soak and rub and boil and rinse,—
(The sun's on the apple-blooms outside!)
Tubs, pans, pins, lakelets of blue,
Hillocks of white bursting—bubbling—through;
The kitchen's amuck with steam and haste,
Slatternly labor and watery waste;
A woman dodging from stove to tub;
Soak and lather and rinse and rub;
(The sun's on the apple-bloom outside!)...
Two sodden hands folded, white at last,
Over her tired The Great Rest cast,
One of the Leisure Sex.

Polish and crawl, and crawl again,—
(The world's a-dance in the Park below!)
The white length of the corridor,
Inch by inch o'er the marble floor,
The creeping women lather and scrub,
Lather and rinse and dry and rub;
Polish and crawl and lather anew,
The crimson breakings, the midnights through;
(The world's a-dance in the Park below!)...
Aching knees unbended, straight at last,
Over her tired The Great Rest cast,
One of the Leisure Sex.

Scour and sweep and shine and clean,—
(The book's forgotten upon the shelf!)
Mops, brooms, dishes, windows and doors,
Peelings and grounds, crusts, tops and cores;

Moths and iron rust, mold and gashes,
Stains, rents, cock roaches, coals and ashes;
From garret to cellar with the rounding sun,
A day ended is a day begun,
(The book's forgotten upon the shelf!)...
A broken frame stretched, healed at last,
Over her tired The Great Rest cast,
One of the Leisure Sex.

ENVOY.

O men who work and children who play,
The dirt of the world is cleaned away
By the dainty Leisure Sex.

BROKEN.

A tiny heap of glittering
Shining out in the darkness here;
I could sweep it away with my hand
Though it once out-balanced gold and land;
Could sweep the heap to ruin and rust,
My star dust.

Beautiful once, a perfect thing,
A delight to see and hold close;
Broken now, I sweep it away,
Sweep it away to night and decay,
Sweep the heap to ruin and rust,
My star dust.

AS THE CRIMSON DIES.

Somehow, last night, as the wind howled without,
And my heaped crimson coals burned low,
I got to wonderin' and thinkin' about
Johnnie Mohen, my first, first beau;
Again was skylarked in the old playground;
I laughed in his deep-dancing eyes;
Shadowy forms leaped to life all 'round,—
Dreams, dreams, dreams, as the crimson dies.

Those eyes shown like gems on a poet's hand
That day he lied for Bronson Renn;
Bronson stole Bub's luncheon, and had the sand
To take the lickin', too, and when
He stood up, white and lank,—his folks was poor,—
Johnnie Mohen up and yelled out,
"I et Bub Thompson's grub!" and a quick, sure,
Admiring silence fell about.

I knew that I loved him right then and there;
He was so brave and grand and true;
Cried when she walloped him; I didn't care
For appearances, or who knew
That I loved; my soul was melted in bliss;
I cleaned my desk, washed the slate rags,
Missed twice in gog'fee, and at recess
We both were It in the game, which was tags.

On Valentine's Day he gave me a heart
Of white chewing wax, with a verse
On an elegant scroll; I gave him part,—
The best half,—and in sweet converse
We sat on the top step, and gazed and chewed;

And at Mate Mead's surprise party
We shyly kissed, as we viewed
The eatin's, we, "The Committee."
It wasn't much of a kiss, dear, dear Boy;
You were awkward and I was scared;
Yet to feel the sudden and wicked joy,
The shame that you had really dared
To do what I'd been 'spectin' all along...
In the lightest and softest way
It brushes my cheek where the wrinkles throng...
Dreams, dreams, dreams, while the red burns gray.

TWO APRILS.

Last Spring when radiant April's pulse
Leaped high in the joy of new birth,
One beautiful day you went away
Dulling the mirth of the gay green earth.

Now, April again, its birds and buds;
My heart, vacant, looking for you,
Fearing the way of the beautiful May,
Dreading all through the joy and the blue.

April for me? It cannot be so;
I shut down the wide window fast;
I bear as I may your being away,
And that April last—that April last!

THE CAGED SINGERS.

As if this July day were not replete
  In its perfect self, its essence complete,
Not beauty enough in its lissome hours,
  Not joyance enough in its crowding flowers,
Comes a molten shrilling, a jubilant glee,
  Pealing, repealing, a column of sound
That towers and rocks on the shaken ground;
  High and triumphant the blithe notes pour
From earth's green roof to heaven's gold floor;
  Such ardor the world knew in its strong youth
Ere sin and love and sorrow and ruth
  Bowed its proud height and silvered its hair;
Music God up in His throne room can spare
  Because His bright harpers keep 'tendance there;—
    Just a caged canary this summer's day,
    Trilling the heart of his manhood away!

Higher and keener, thin, piercing and loud,
  The rapid notes ripple and mount and crowd
Till my tears fall fast on the page adown,
  And my pitying heart is crushed and drowned
In the flood of ecstatic melody;
  How *can* he sing so with the gold bars there,
And the wide world stretching, benign and fair,
  With clovers and daisies and daffodils spread,
The war of the living, the peace of the dead,
  And over it all the limitless sky
For men who aspire and birds that fly!
  If only some Hand with the right would kill
The glad little bird!...Dear God, please still
  That lovely voice's exultant thrill!
    I cannot endure it this summer's day;
    Kill the bird or take the gold bars away!

RESPONSIBILITY.

As I stood at my window this summer day
A blue-bottle buzzed and buzzed away;
I thought, "I'll just out you out in the air,"
And I struck full soft at the blue-bottle there;
He keeled right over, his feet on his brow;
I said, "Since I've hurt you I'll kill you now!"
So I did.

And then I thought how, on this summer's day,
In a distant town a man toils away
With a ragged hurt in his noble life,
And gallant forgiveness for stabber and knife;
And as I stood there I thought, I'll allow,
"Since she's hurt him ought she not kill him now?"
I wonder?

CONCERNING US, DEAR.

I know he stands in a world made with hands,
The man that I hold in my heart;
I know he meets in the vagabond streets
Temptations that give him clean start;
I know he slips back in the well-worn track
Beaten smooth by his fellow-men;
He walks in broad day in the human way,
In no sense a god among men;
But I love him, he knows, and he quietly goes
Through a better world that I do.

I've not claimed I'd go through seas of woe,
Nor lay down my life at his feet;
I've not called his eyes blue as April skies,
Nor his voice rarest music sweet;
I've not held his manhood the source of all good,
Nor his truth all the truth there is;
I've not held his deed beyond human meed
Merely because the deed was his;
But I love him, he knows, and he quietly goes
Through a better world that I do.

And he knows my life is lived midst the strife
Of the self-same troubled old world;
He knows that I meet on the self-same street
Temptations velvet-shod and furled;
He knows that I fall and grasp wide and call,
Like most of my sister women;
I walk in the day in the human way,
In no sense a saint among women;
But he loves me, I know, and I quietly go
Through a better world that he does.

"OLE ASHUS!"

"No place to go but out,
  No place to come but back,"—
Verily that rhymster knew
  How to be blue all the way through!
Cold and wet, no May in sight,
  April seems out of heart;
Shivers dancing down your spine,
  Or little devils, ninety and nine!

Can't stay in, too beastly cold;
  Can't go out, too beastly wet;
Guess I'll read philosophy,
  That'll do the blues—or me!
Solemn gray book, plain and fat;
  Paulsen,—how I used to love him,
In those days when pale Ennui
  Never exchanged cards with me!

How it's marked and thumbed and scored;
  Rare, close friend, Herr Paulsen once!
Strange how one neglects such stuff
  For paste diamonds in the rough!

. . . . . .

"Anthromorphic theism
  Asserts, on the other hand;
It is not conceivable that —"
  "Ole ashus! Ole ashus!" Oh, that—

That wretched coon on his wagon!
"Anthromorphic theism
Asserts—" "Ole ashus! Ole ashus!"
I'd like to give him fifty lashes!—
"... theism asserts, its not
Conceivable that the unity—"
"Ole ashus! Ole ashus!" "... organization
And arrangement—" I'll see that soon!

"... arrangement of reality is—"
"Ole ashus! Ole ashus!" D—! ! !
I won't see it till doom's day
With that wretched coon bleating that way!
"Ole ashus!" I give it up!
There, solemn, dear gray book!
You've driven away my ennui;
Ole ashus will be the end of me!

WHAT DO I THANK YOU FOR MOST, O IDEAL?

What do I thank you for most, O Ideal
That men in the wistful dark have called God?
That new-fallen snow lies light, fresh, untrod;
The moon is alone in the sky; I feel
The old impulse to cry aloud, to kneel
To Something Higher than I,—that up-leap
Of the spirit when deep answers to deep,—
Would die—oh so well!—itself to reveal!
The sleeping roofs tucked around with the snow;
I lean my face against the window pane,
My life drinks in slow the serene white rest,
And when I can breathe for the silence, I know
What I thank God for most, the sad years' gain;
That I still love my dead sister the best.

A SONG YET TO BE SUNG.

O poet of the golden throat
  And the tender, pulsing human note,
Make a song for me,
  A song of the purple prairies free!
Say how the sun peeps o'er the rim
  Of the silent brown, his eyes a-brim
With new joy, from his laughing hands
  Pouring the light of a thousand lands,
    A King's largess!
How the purple ripples to meet the sky,
  How it foams and eddies, now low, now high,
And stretches away, away, away!
  O heart of the prairies, regal and May,
Boundless, infinite, stretching away,
    Away, away, away!
O heart of the prairies, royal and June,
  You pulse full, free, to the beautiful tune
    Of your own wild life!
O poet, sing that life for me,
  The life of the purple prairies free!

O poet of the words of gold,
  And the noble singing, true and bold,
Sing this song for me,
  The song of the purple prairies free!
Sing of the rose-gray mists that rise
  And melt to blue soft as summer skies,—
Melt to lavender, hyacinth pale
  Sweeping it all like a bridal veil,
    A King's gift-lace!
How it gathers to darkness, rich and warm,
  How it deeps to dark and the thunder storm,

And stretches away, away, away!
Changing alway, that wondrous rose-gray,
Coquetting, evanishing, melting away,
Away, away, away!
Dear poet, sing this song for me
Whose words are no longer golden and free;
I'll give you my heart,
See, it's here in my hand,
For an adequate song of my prairie land!

HE STRUCK ME.

He struck me, a coward word
From the rubied hilt of his anger;
He struck me; amazed, I heard,
Swerved aside a whole instant, then stood
Straight and tall and still, no leap
In all my being. Now, smiling, I see
Him toy with the hilt, and keep
The rubies a-dance to daze my eyes;
There is no fear, leashed by will;
No courage, God-founded. Smiling, I see
Him strike. I have no life to kill.

THE BREAD-WAGON HORSE.

Every morning as I go past
On my way to seven-o'clock breakfast,
I see him hitched to the bread-wagon,
Waiting for the bread man to come on,
The dear little bread-wagon horse!
He takes no notice of my advances,
He never changes his feet, nor glances
At me as I rub his nose and say,
"Good morning, Horsey. How're you to-day?"
He has found the world such a long, hard row
He thinks I'm just pretending, I know,
The dear little bread-wagon horse!

I lower my voice to the tenderest tone,—
I want him to know that I love him, I own,—
And try to talk of what he cares about;
But he only sighs gently, and out
Of the tail of his fixed and abstracted eye
Comes a gleam that makes me go on by,
And leave him there with his bread-wagon,
Waiting for the bread man to come on,
The dear little bread-wagon horse!

He's tired of life, the little bread-wagon horse,
But he takes his tired as a matter of course,
And goes up and down the endless streets,
Nor lifts his head, nor smiles, nor greets
The men and boys and dogs he meets;
He cogitates on the deep, queer things,—
Long, long thoughts brooding on slow, still wings,—
Till night time sweet oblivion brings
To the tired little bread-wagon horse!

I don't know what he looks forward to,
I don't know what he looks backward to;
I only know as I see him go
Up and down, up and down the weary ways,
On fair and rainy, on cold and warm days,
That if there be A Land of Ultimate Rest
For men, horses and dogs who deserve the best,
He'll some day browse in the pastures there,
And every day'll be bright and fair;
And if, some day on the golden street,
As I nose about, I chance to meet
Him waiting by the crystal curbstone,
No longer downcast, troubled and lone,
But a radiant steed, hitched by ropes of sapphire
To a splendid, bran-new chariot of fire,
I'll accept it gladly as the just due
Of one who was faithful, punctual and true,
Though only a bread-wagon horse.

These crimson flecks, love's toss and foam, I send
To you,—crimson, fear, pain, elation, all,—
All response a woman's heart can forstall
When man's love requires to what pause, what end
The waves' multitudinous surges that blend
Vast, dim purple pulsings with one clear call,
Tender, secure in cadenced rise and fall,
As if a lark sang the discord to mend!
To what end, this beating blow upon blow,
Strange, loud, vague and dark in your blinded ears?
I have asked of the birds, the rose, the clod,—
To be able to tell you I would go
To the farthest world—oh Love, by these tears
Believe that I hope the tumult speaks God!

MY RATHERS.

I.

I'd rather write poor rhymes at home
  Than go and call on "folks;"
I'd rather read my Masters rare
  Than listen vaudeville jokes;
I'd rather have ox-eyed daisies
  From fields the sunlight kisses
Than all the roses grown 'neath glass
  For modish dames and misses;
I'd rather have an honest man
  In blue denim overalls
Than the sleek, white-handed grafters
  That adorn our Senate halls;
A dog who wags his tail and smiles
  When I pass him in the street
Gives me a cleaner-hearted joy
  Than many humans I meet;
A fluttering leaf, an alley cat,
  Banged sideways, scarred and blinded,
Arrest and hold my heart because—
  Well, 'cause I'm that way minded.

Oh, I always have my rathers,
  And I know them, rank and file;
But in this stylish neighborhood
  They have to bide awhile.

II.

I'd rather talk with engineers
  Than young beaux who call at four;
Or carpenters or plasterers
  Can tell you a whole lot more;

I'd rather walk down a country road
  Than toot down the Avenue,
Or play with a child whose blood is red
  Than sluggish with royal blue;
I'd rather tell the truth to friends
  And knock my enemies down
Than smug, suave and respectable,
  Walk safe through all the town;
I'd rather speak truth of the dead
  And epitaph the living,
And measure my gifts by my love,
  Not other people's giving;
A twittering bird, a ragged tramp,
  Banged sideways, scarred and blinded,
Arrest and hold my heart because—
  Well, 'cause I'm that way minded.

Oh, I always have my rathers,
  And I know them, rank and file;
But in a world built as this is
  They have to bide awhile.

MIDNIGHT.

The pages are finished; the story is told;
The household is sleeping; my study grows cold;

Like shadows the fancies fade slowly away,
And there remains only the thoughts plain and gray;

The midnight around me lies vast, like a sea,—
Look, where that great sea gull sails straightly to me!

He bears on his bosom a hope writ in white,
Fair as his breast is and sweet as the night;

The night that lies silent around me, a sea,
O'er which the great snow gull sails straightly to me!

You bright virgin rover of sky and of sea,
I kiss from your bosom the hope writ for me;

Sail straightly, sail straightly, swift threading the deep,
And sweeten the midnight of Somebody's sleep;

Brush soft on his pillow the kiss on your breast,
And whisper your whiteness deep into his rest;

Fan dim through his dreaming some vision of me,
Mingled with the freshness of sky and of sea!

Then homing safe to me, his breath on your breast,
Encircle the hours of my dreaming rest;

Fan slow through the silence your breast's fragrant white,
A presence, enguarding, all through the night.

BEAUTY.

In all this great big town to-day
  I saw just one fair thing;
Not roses, no, nor violets,
  Though fresh with the freshness of Spring;
Not women, though the day was mild
  And they winged brilliant flight;
Not the passionless piles of stone;
  Serene in the sunlight;
I grant these fair, but fairer far
  That action, human, sweet,
A cripple helping a blind man
  Across the crowded street.

A CONDOLENCE.

In the Tribune to-day, as I scanned
The movements of warships, and sea and land
Forces, the markets, the races, the crimes,—in brief,
The doings and sayings of Gog and Magog,
I saw your grief
Like a crimson light swung high in the fog.
Five terse lines; "Died, the beloved wife..."
In the blank black of night a sob-stayed sigh...
Of the kings and the nations, their clamor and clatter
I heard no more. The crimson light swung high.

I am trying to write you. I desire that you know—
Feel—how it is with my heart when your woe
Touches it. And yet, how to put it, dear friend of old!
You said once,—I remember the day...
We used to say
Very clever things in clover time...
You said that in this world Sorrow is King,
And I laughed, denying. When radiant May
Is melting to June in resonant rhyme
It is easy to scorn. You were right;
I have made rich amends for the light
Scorn of youth and of joy and of June.
In purple and cypress, in crimson and rue,
Sorrow *is* King. I have walked his palace through.
And do you know what I hold the saddest thing
In this world of woes, where Sorrow is King?
Not the putting our dead down under the ground,—
Forgive if I hurt you!—the fall of earth
On the coffin lid is not earth's saddest sound;
Not the cooling of love, nor the frown
Of a God too exacting to let one die
When all there is to do is to die;
Not any, not all, of these; but this;

And across the waste of hates forgotten,
Of hopes long starved, and remorse grown tame,
I lean to say it...In the same
Old way. Where is the clover scent
And the faint rose-purple the dying day lent?...
That we cannot endure for others;
That our deepest pain is impotent
To save whom we would one little stab;
We prate of pity, and feel it, too;
Of "sympathy," and through
The heart an anguish steals
Alike in kind, maybe, degree;
Sympathy? Oh yes, of course one feels,
But the feeling does not help, there's the woe!
Powerless, wistful, we stand close by
While the pain we covet leaps into a cry!

So I say I think it the saddest thing,
The woefullest, bitterest, hardest thing
In this world of woes, where Sorrow is King.
And I think, too... In the same
Old way we used to say
Such things, while the rose grew gray...
I think that the happiest man,
The joyfullest, luckiest, thankfullest man
Was the Christ!
And the stupid world, in its sand-blind way,
Has pitied him, brought praises and palms!
The one to whom I stretch my hand
In aching pity,—as I hope you grope
In the dark for mine,—
Is the waiting mother, in agony there,
With love enough, but no power to bear
His pain for Him.

I love you, my friend.

THE NEXT MORNING.

"A box for you,—left here by a big boy,"
  Says a shy soft voice at my bedroom door;
I forget the child, for the midmost core
  Of all things just now is my leaping joy;
For the square purple box holds, I divine,
  English violets, violets for me,
And he loves me, loves me, loves me, you see,—
  His heart and his life and his thoughts are mine!

I unfold the ribbon that binds it sure,
  Then...filmy paper crushed into a nest,
And there in purpled and perfumed rest,
  Tucked about with amethyst shadows, pure,
Tender, clinging together, wet and warm,
  The exquisite, exquisite violets,
Sign of a faith that ne'er sleeps nor forgets,—
  My love's rain-bow after last night's dire storm!

I NEVER DREAMED OF YOUR DYING, DEAR.

I never once dreamed of your dying, Dear;
I listened old soldiers tell of the fear
That strode like iron along the taut veins;
Of the ghastly blood-jet,—death on the plains
Of battle, all round the dead heaped high
While the big moon crawled across the waste sky
And the stars came out, and the sun rose red;
I knew what the great philosophers said,
And the sweet-toned poets, what they thought of death;
I conned them with tears that stung, with held breath
That so vast a woe could inhabit here,
But I never dreamed of *your* dying, Dear.
I watched while the roses' bright color crept
From their faded cheeks, and there only slept
A tiny dust heap on the marble there.
Ah yes, I knew death was everywhere;
That at the heart of things it curled, and feed
Deep and deeper, as my dear poets said;
I saw graves,—tears, but it seemed far away,
And though Death was, May was none the less May;
You knew so much to be and to do,
Life was deep-bosomed with meanings for you;
Your blood beat gallant music, bold and clear—
I never once *dreamed* of your dying, Dear.

THE LUSITANIA.

"The ship is plowing along at nearly twenty-six knots an hour with scarcely a tremor."—Times' Wireless Telegraph.

On, on, on to Westward, her strength unfurled,
The maiden ship watched by a waiting world;
Though fogs may thicken and fringéd clouds lower
She's tipping twenty-six knots an hour,—
Twenty-six knots an hour!
Her beautiful body, erect, superb,
Obeying her will without let or curb;
Supple and fresh in unbroken flower
She's tipping twenty-six knots an hour,—
Twenty-six knots an hour!

It is not who owns her, who built or planned;
Not how she's furnished or engined or manned;
She stands for the Age, for modern power,
She's tipping twenty-six knots an hour,—
Twenty-six knots an hour!
She stands for what we can do with our brains,
How control and conserve our gigantic gains;
Type and Fulfillment of Modern Power,
She's tipping twenty-six knots an hour,—
Twenty-six knots an hour!

Our wishes sparkle and tumble and foam
'Round her steadfast prow, all wistful at home;
We cheer on her will, her masterless dower;
She's tipping twenty-six knots an hour,—
Twenty-six knots an hour!
Our hearts are with her in all her ways,
Through fog and bell, through dark, shine, and haze;
Incarnate Spirit of Modern Power,
She's tipping twenty-six knots an hour,—
Twenty-six knots an hour!

"DIED, THE BELOVED WIFE . . . "

From heaven three chaste-robed angels
  Watched a mother in travail;
"It is very sad," the first one said;
  "Yes, it is Life," the second one said;
"No, it is death," the third one said;
  But the truths they spake did not avail
Nor the pity of the sweet angels;
  Heaven gained and the earth lost
As always, to human cost!

A CROWNING.

Hamlet, of all the princes who have walked
Upon "this goodly frame, the earth," walked fair
'Neath "this most excellent canopy, the air;"
Hamlet, of all the princes who have talked
Loud of things mundane and supernal, too,
O Most Best and Dearest, do I love you!

Hamlet, if I get past old Saint Peter,
I'll ask of the very first one I see
Not to show Shakespeare (or Bacon) to me;—
I know a greater joy, a completer
I'll crave with the first whiff of heaven's blue;
O Most Best and Dearest, I'll ask for you!

And Hamlet, I'll bring a crown in my hand;
I'll steal it for you from the Denmark throne;—
If it be real stealing to take one's own!—
That "precious diadem," golden and grand,
I'll snuggle it close, Dear, and sneak it through,—
O Most Best and Dearest, I'll crown just you!

THE NAMELESS ST. GAUDENS.

"Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet;
If it could weep it could arise and go."

The Figure speaks:

Mortal, why do you seek me out,
Your fresh tears tender and wet?
I cannot comfort or stead you,
I have no loss to forget.

Nothing have I in common
With human or demon or God;
Thoughtless, passionless, powerless,
Nor fire, nor spirit, nor clod;

Alpha am I, and Omega,
The Am Not, The Uncreate,
To time and space and life and God
The Eternal Unrelate.

Call on your gods who remember,
Gods like yourself that can die;
I have forgotten...forgotten;
Returned to oblivion, I.

Or call aloud to your fellows
Who rouse but a little to weep
E'er they sink to deeper slumber,
To Nirvana, The Silence, The Sleep.

But when you, too, have forgotten,
Sunk to vast slumber again,
Nor demon nor angel nor mortal,
Your clamor will quiet then;

In silence more silent than death's,
In spaces immenser than space,
In darkness everlasting
We shall forget, face to face.

"KING WILLIAM WAS KING JAMES'S SON."

A girl I fared forth on a poppy-edged road;
The sunshine streamed full, the lark sang free—
Music that my heart might lifted be!
The sun and the lark and the poppies and I
Laughed aloud as we clasped the world's circling hands!
Over stones and mire I lightly strode;
The sunshine attended, the lark sang free,—
Beauty all made to encompass me!
The sun and the lark and the poppies and I
Laughed bold as we reached for the world's circling hands!

A woman I fare on a plain, brown road;
The sunshine is vagrant, the lark is dead;
No buoyant lilt heartens my careful tread;
The sun and the lark and the poppies and I
Do not struggle to grasp the world's circling hands!
Is there mire,—waste slough? I shift my load,
Pick my steps, stolid, and look straight ahead;
The sunshine is vagrant, the lark is dead;
The shine and the lark and the poppies and I
Have missed in the game the world's circling hands!

"A TESTIMONIAL."

She sat opposite me in an F Street car;
I knew her face perfectly, and I bowed;
She stared, sat erecter, then looked afar;
I blushed, looked down, twisted, and inwardly vowed
I'd recall where I'd met her. I went through
The past several months, but I couldn't place
Her name, the occasion. In solemn review
All the people I'd met passed by, but her face
Was not among them. I stole a shy look
At the woman, erect and offended there;
Yes, I knew her well—knew her like a book!
Then I swore to myself in reckless dare,
"Now, by the sacred radiance of the Sun,
By the frivolous stars and candid Luna,
I'll know where—" Then it flashed. The day was won!
I breathed again; she was "cured by Peruna!"

"DIGNITY."

She was a little dried-up old woman
  With a constant and kindly squint;
Her chin and her nose met in friendly converse,
  Her eyes were a restless, far hint
Of lamps long dimmed by rains. And as we walked
  We spoke of the Home for the Old,
The prison-like brick on the stately street
  Where her poor useless days were told.

"That's a nice old lady I met with you,
  At the social last night," I said;
"Who? That Miss Hanson?" and the long-dimmed lamps
  Glowed with something of their lost red;
"Oh yes, Miss Hanson's nice enough, I 'spose,
  But then she's not married, you see;
She's reel smart and can do lots of things,
  But she aint got the dignity."

"'Dignity?'—what do you mean, Mrs. Cobb?"
  I asked, though I saw plain at once;
"She's jes' an old maid,—never had no man;
  But we don't make no differunce;
We try to treat her as good as the rest,
  But she aint got no dignity."
And then, since we'd reached the turreted gate
  She hobbled slow in and left me.

And I mused my way down the stately street;
  "If you can but capture a man,
He may outrage and beat and insult you,
  Be as faithless as human can;

Your life and your home may be broken—stained,—
  Drunkenness, curses, dirt and brawl;
But the dignity of the title,
  The "Mrs." will cover it all!

"You may sit bold in the infamous light
  That floods the unclean divorce court;
You may sell your body for carriages,
  Gems, wines, laces,—gauds of that sort;
You may play freer in open pastures,
  Your wanton eyes searching the Mall,
But the dignity of the "Mrs."
  Will cover it, corners and all!"

"EXPECT ME THE TENTH."

The day has been lovely but I've not seen
  The bursting bud nor the fast-spreading green;
The day has been lovely but I've not heard
  The nestling swallow or busy blue-bird;
It was lissome and debonair, I knew,
  But my thoughts were of to-morrow and you;
It's the ninth. You'd be here the tenth, you wrote,—
  To-morrow! Could my joy-dumb senses note
To-day? The bees settled on the clover,
  And my full heart brimmed up—up—and over
The fresh green below, the fresh blue above,
  Passed it all. To-morrow, O homing love!

THE RED RAT.

A Political Ballad.

1908.

The rats they got so awful bad
That the Man of the House, he said,
"I'm going to catch me a big, big rat
And paint him a bright, bright red;
He'll scare all the rats away from the place,
I've often heard it said."

He caught him a rat
And he painted it red
From its nose to the tip of its tail;
When the paint had dried,
"Aroint! he cried,
And the rat he dashed away;
"In a week there won't be a rat in sight!"
Said the Man of the House that day.

The rats they were all amazed to see
Such a gorgeous and beautiful red;
"He must be a very fine rat, you know;
A superior rat," they said;
"Who would ever dream that there could be
Such a gorgeous and beautiful red!"

And the rats they made him King;
He lorded it over the other rats,
For he was red and they were gray;
They made him King
With a biff and a swing,
O the rats they made him King!

From every side came big gray rats
Attracted by his fame;
As time went on his red wore off
But he lorded it just the same;
"He's a most superior rat," they said,
And they brought him the cheese and bread;
And he reigned and reigned and reigned and reigned
Because he had once been red!
"The rats are getting a dern sight worse!"
The Man of the House, he said.

ENVOY.

O the rats they made him King!
O the rats they made him King!
He lorded it over the other rats,
For he was red and they were gray;
With a biff and a swing
They made him King,
O the rats they made him King!

FOR HER.

"You are quite right, Love," he said;
  They rose and stood quiet, apart;
Then—a hand on her bowed head;
  Then—a dying step in her heart.

Only that faint, far-dying step
  And his last word beating there;
And the two a dull rhythm kept,
  And the clock ticked thick on the stair.

...She saw a woman alone,
  And all the drear years had been;
"Dear God in heaven," she made moan,
  "Make this hour happy *then!*"

NOT QUITE UNIVERSAL.

Oh I get so tired of what Balzac knows
  About women! If I happen to say
Or do anything queer, my lover goes
  Off in a rigmarole about the way
Balzac says women think and hope and feel;
  It's Balzac, Balzac, Balzac, till I'd steal
A gun to shoot the wretched Frenchman!

There's nothing Balzac didn't know
  About women, I'm told ten times a day!
"But *I* don't feel so," I say. "You do, though,"
  He cries, quick, "Balzac says..." and that's the way
We go on and on, and he really doubts
  If I know myself, know my ins and outs,
Because I can't Amen Balzac!

There's one thing M. Balzac didn't know
  For all of his learning, hooded and gray;
For all the woman's hearts he'd dug so
  Deeply down in, and the wondrous way
He probed fresh wounds, pulsing, crimson and wet;—
  There was *one* knowledge wanting Balzac yet;
He never knew *me*, one R. Woodman!

BEATEN.

"Why do I cumber the earth?" she said;
(All of the people she loved were dead;)
"Ashes are lighter!"

"Why do I labor and tire?" she said;
(All the ideals of her youth were dead.)
"Ashes are lighter!"

"The money buys only bread," she said;
(All the hopes of her heart were dead.)
"Ashes are lighter!"

"Life is too heavy for me," she said;
(The fruits she held in her hands were dead.)
Ashes *were* lighter!

"A SORROW'S CROWN OF SORROW."

Sweetheart Girl, do you remember the days,
The longed-for, peerless, red-letter days
When Mamma got into her trunk?
That's what we called it, you know, and we'd track
Her about the house, clamoring at her back,
"Please, Mamma, get into your trunk!"

That sweet, dim odor of herbs and perfume
And camphor balls that crept through the room
When Mamma got into her trunk!
Sometimes it steals on me, soft, unaware,
And you and Mamma and I kneel there
On the floor by that big black trunk.

You're holding the ivory purse 'graved so fine,
And I, the crimson silk shawl,—which is mine!
And Mamma leans 'way in the trunk!
We both claim the handkerchief with the stag
In the 'broidered wreath, and we tease and brag,
While Mamma digs 'round in the trunk!

Put safe away with your treasures we found
That ivory purse with its hunting hound
In the very depths of your trunk!
And the mingled odors of herbs and perfume
Filled my eyes—my heart, as we knelt in your room,
Mamma and I, alone, by your trunk.

Old joys smiled sadly at us from the gloom,
Of that dear, faint-lighted, low-browed store-room,
As we knelt, alone, by your trunk;
But the women who knelt there had only tears
And tender, vain kisses for those lost years,
As they bowed low over your trunk.

IN KANSAS.

Out in Kansas a man's a man,
  And does the best he knows and can;
He doesn't brag on his ancestry
  To make his folks out better'n they be;
He says his say, then he ups and goes,
    And out on the plain the free wind blows.

He doesn't bark up your family tree
  Nor sit back on your ancestry;
What are *you,* and what can you *do?*
  And his keen eyes bore you clean, clean through;
Personal power, that's all that goes,
    And out on the plain the free wind blows.

ENVOY.

In the East and the South
  They blow with their mouth;.
    In Kansas we let the *winds* blow.

SPRING SONG.

Now doth the wily Congressman
  Proceed to get polite,
And offer to his dear constits.
  'Most everything in sight.
He hopes that he "may be of use
  In any public way,"
And would be glad to hear their views
  "On the topics of the day."
Now doth he send "a public doc"
  To each waiting constit.,
And "under separate cover"
  Lets fly those gems of lit.;
And pink-faced bags of garden seed,
  Lumpy and flat and square,
Falling in showers as the sparks
  Of a rocket spent in air!
And books anent the noble Horse,
  His diseases and their cure;
And Bulletins on how to keep
  The milk and butter pure;
He shies 'em here, he shunts 'em there,
  With letters brief but strong,
And bursting vans of the House P. O.
  The groaning pavements throng!

Let other rhymesters sing the rose
  And the lily, virgin fair;
I sing the subtle Congressman,
  And his boquets of Hot Air!
Let others woo the wanton, Love,
  With all her pretty folly;
Give me the winsome Congressman
  With all his Spring-time "jolly!"

WHEN DEAN SINGS "THE BEDOUIN."

When he sings!
Ah me, when he sings!
Crimson lights, ten thousand wings
Of golden fancies and dreams untold,
Glories and hopes and flowers unfold,
When he sings!
Ah me, when he sings!

That song!
Ah me, that song!
The boundless desert, the long, long,
Long miles 'twixt Love and Life;
The haste, the longing, the struggle, the strife,—
That song!
Ah me, that song!

When he sings!
When he sings that song!
Ah me, when he sings that song!
The passion, the madness, and love as long
As stars eternal and ageless sun,
And love by singing and singer won,
When he sings!
When he sings that song,
Ah me, when he sings that song!

JARIUS' DAUGHTER.

In the purple deeping they waited her
  Who wandered, silent, at will,
Her mother and father, and in each heart
  One thought brooded, low and still;
She had tried to speak it, her sorrow strange,
  She thought but of it alway;
He had thought to speak of it long ago,
  For that he lived through each day;
Two people thinking together, apart,
  In the sad, drear, human way.

Each knew that the other desired with tears
  To name the grief that weighed them,
And their straited silence throbbed thin and quick,
  And their startled eyes betrayed them;
Each searching the pain for words that reveal
  Found none, but one pulse-leap, "Rise!"
Each saw plain—ah God, the taut sheet tremble,
  The life flash back to her eyes;
With the same new amaze they saw their child
  Returning from Paradise!

The rich dark pressed close, the stars came out;
  Silent, they waited for her;
And each was thinking how better, sweeter
  The grave with its spice and myhrr,
Than to come back here after knowing God,
  And take up earth's ways instead;
This daughter, returned, was none of theirs,
  Their child who had died was dead;
Yet—remembering His voice, they could not pray,
  "Dear Christ, let our dead be dead!"

A GOODBYE.

"I abandon you, Oh my bridges!"
I cried in the bitter night;
"Fair and firm and true you were built,
And proudly, as in love's sight;
But now I give you over
To the torch and the eating flame;
Be there no bridges hereafter
In this valley without a name!"

"My beautiful burning bridges,
How bravely you topple and sway,
Lighting, 'mid shrieks of flame-laughter,
The black miles, stretching away!
How gaily you greet your ruin,
Your brilliant eyes flashing desire,
How you tremble and whisper and shiver,
Oh my bridges, enamored of fire!"

"Fall to white ashes, and scatter,
Oh bridges builded in love!
May the meadows lie barren around you,
And the sun shine cold above!
Only the jackal remember,
As he prowls the desolate night,
The shrill of that far flame-laughter,
The glare of that blood-red light!"

"Yet I know very well, Oh bridges
I builded in passion and pride,
That over your vanished roadways
We must walk, he and I, side by side;
In vain is the wrack and the ruin,
The waste of the valley bright,
For Memory still travels the bridges
We burn in the bitter night."

"GOOD NIGHT, SWEETHEART!"

A-quiver like pearls on a woman's breast
The low words fall soft on the summer dark...
In the tranquil purple a vagrant spark
Glows here—there—is gone; the trumpet flowers
Seem to herald my listening as I stand
Bereft, the touch of his lips on my hand,
And only the sleeping houses around...
The distant scream of an engine, and deep
The insects' multitudinous sleep...
Does he linger in the low-wooded way,
Or half turn to come back? In sympathy
The stillness holds its breath with me
One perfect purple pulse. Then—then we breathe,
And I say again, gently,—for who knows
How straight to the mark a true love-word goes?—
I say again, gently, "Goodnight, Sweetheart!"

A VICTIM OF SOCIETY.

He sits on a black silk cushion
  Embroidered with yellow roses,
And looks through the window all day,
  And gazes and smirks and dozes;
He yawns aloud from sheer ennui,
  Finding life dried up at the core,—
Hardly worth while, I know he thinks,
  The poor little dog next door.

On fine days he goes for a walk
  At the end of a silver chain;
He and the Madam walk three blocks,
  Then solemnly pace home again;
He's 'fraid of everything he sees
  And he votes all outings a bore,
As he's dangled and yanked along,
  The poor little dog next door.

Poor little tyke, he's never lived,
  Never mingled free with his kind;
Never chased alley cats, hooked bones,
  Barked loud, nor snarled, bit, growled, nor whined!
He's been despoiled of his birthright,
  Nor left with sense to deplore,—
A puff-ball make-believe for a child,
  The poor little dog next door!

A RECIPE.

When I'm very tired, and the world goes wrong,
To restore the glint and silver and song
I read "Pickwick."
I help catch those rascals, Jingle and Job;
The ways of the sorry old Fleet I probe,
And fall through the ice, and eat cold pork pie,
And watch the sedan-chair dragged grandly by,
With Mr. Pickwick inside!
I get *so* angry with Mrs. Bardell,—
Indeed who does not who loves Pickwick well?—
And Dodson and Fogg I dearly hate,
And that red-nosed Stiggings, early and late
At the Marquis of Granby,
Eating buttered toast and pine-apple rum,
When he thinks T. Weller not likely to come!
And I always wriggle my toes in glee
When T. Weller souses him,—Sam and me
Stand by and grin, holding his wide-craped hat,
For the red-nosed man deserved worse than that,
At the Marquis of Granby!

When I'm cross as a bear and all's awry,
I mount the high coach and come riding by
To the Great White Hart;
Or I 'tend the wedding at Dingley Dell,
Or josh with Dr. Bob Sawyer a spell,
Or seek Magistrate Nupkins, august and grand,
My heart in my mouth, my hat in my hand,
And hear Pickwick arraigned;
Any old place so Mr. Pickwick's there;
Bath, London, Rochester, I don't care;

I'll follow him, believe in him any place,
And bask in the light of his kindly face,
Dear Mr. Pickwick!
Pickwick and Sam, you Immortal Two,
Gratitude, happiness, largess to you!
You can brighten and lift the rainiest day,
And yarn the fretfulest temper away;
You've kept me quick through long burdening years
To the frankest laughter, the freshest tears,
Mr. Pickwick and Sam!

AUNT KATE.

She sits all day at the window,
  Her faded eyes vacant and bright;
Not speaking nor thinking, just sitting
  Till the morning wears to night.

She picks at her snowy apron
  And smooths and smooths her black skirt;
If she laughs it is not in gladness,
  If she sighs it is not in hurt.

The life of the house does not reach her,
  Nor the life of the noisy street,
As she sits all day at the window,
  Tidy and patient and sweet.

She sits all day at the window,
  Her faded eyes vacant and bright,
Not dreaming nor hoping, just sitting
  Till the Dawning break on her night.

AFTER THE YEARS BETWEEN.

Just you and I in the big rolling world
  All by ourselves, Dear Love!
For us the edgeless deeps of blue,
  The wide, wide wondrous blue!
The revolving worlds' stately saraband,
  The myriad suns' scintillant command;
For you and me, Sweet, this broad gold frame,
  This undulant splendor below, above,
A diamond-studded frame for our love!
  For us this living crimson, which leaps
With sibilant laughter from peak to peak,
  From world to world, until all space
Is resonant, and in some far earth
  A child stirs and points, "See! See! A new day!"

Crimson for us,—now wasn't God good
  To remember I loved it so,
And to leave you here in the crimson, Dear,—
  The good, great, gracious God!
Were you away, or the crimson gray,
  My heart had but one half joy;
But to leave you here and the crimson, Dear,—
  The good, dear, gracious God!
What can I do for Him, say to Him,
  Be for Him, the God Who did not forget —
Ah, kiss me, kiss me, kiss me, Dear,
  I think He meant you should,
For He left us here in the crimson, Dear,
  And all the world's away!

"STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT."

"Star light, star bright,"
I have no wish to wish to-night;
Time was, little star, when I saw you rise,
The first bright point in the darkling skies,
My wishes leaped up fast and bold
As a child's pent plans when his task is told!
But now,—ah, now, no wishes throng;
Only endurance, cold and strong;
Only patience, steel-knit with will,
Only the power to stand straight and still;
No wishes. Perhaps from afar
You pity me, passionate little star,—
"Star light, star bright,"
That I have no wish to wish to-night.

A MIRACLE.

Jostle and scrimmage, rumble and roar,
Cars and autos and 'busses before,
'Busses and autos and cars behind,
The alert, the aimless, the crippled, the blind,
Woman and roses, beggars and fakes,
Gentleman, artists, messengers, rakes,
Mothers and babies, thieves and thugs,
Hither and thither, like water bugs,—
Chicago.
And in the midst alone walked I,
Under the brackish vapor called sky,
Wondering what was the use of it all,
And if God listened or cared at all;
When—of a sudden—
I know not why to me
Such a blessed, blessed thing should be;
I know not who,—unless it be God,
Should take my aching heart at its word,
And set your face there,
A something men fall before
And call to and hope on,—
Your face, an instant there,
As if the good God, having light to spare,
Could let you turn a minute to me,
Alone, down here, in the new-made dark.
'Twas a miracle, dear, in the city here,
Revealed to me, just me,
As the saints used to see
The heavens rent by visions sent
Because they were pitied of God.
I did not fall nor kneel nor pray
As the saints were wont, the records say,
But for all of that I believe again
In "the divine interposition"—
How goes it? —"of God to men."

YET NOT ALONE.

It was on the broad brow of Rock Creek
  I found it, the Spring's first clover;
My heart jumped, and I stooped down quick
  To touch it, the sweet red clover!
Four bright blooms, erect on downy stem;
  As I held them your eyes smiled at me...
How constantly memories fringe life's hem!
  The rest of that walk you walked with me!

"HILTON, REBECCA."

Her name was Hilton,—Rebecca, they said,
  Though we didn't know it until she was dead;
Teacher never called, it scared her so,
  But smiled sad at her, and let it go;
But in the seat between the stove and door
  There was somebody,—that is, there was before
They said she was dead, though I couldn't see
  She was much stiller than she used to be.

When she spoke the silence seemed to crack
  From ear to ear, and she'd sort of back
And shy to one side, afraid she'd fall in
  The tremendous place the silence had been.
She moved like white velvet,—though it is queer
  To put it that way, and seemed just here
Between trains, so wouldn't unpack,
  For she would so soon be going back.

The Second Ward was no place for you,
  Rebecca Hilton, you, white all through;
It was very much better for you to go
  Where whiteness is not so marked, you know;
The angels are white, so they won't laugh
  At your big open stillness, and your flat, half
Sideways jerks when you try to break it;
  Perhaps full speech the angels will make it!

TO MY BLUE CALICO.

It makes my heart hurt to put you aside
From the work-world forever, dear old dress!
We've been together many a day
Taking blithely the work and the play,
Days that were fairest, noblest and rarest,
Fresh, like you, and crisp and lace-trimmed,
Days crowned and garlanded, jeweled and brimmed!
For all I've endured while a-wearing you,
Sweethearting, verse-making, school-keeping, too,
I love you, my calico dress!

And do you know what I love you for most,
Dear old blue dress, with the frayed-out hem?
Because I wore you the very last time
I saw *him*,—when the summer's gay rhyme
Was sweetest and love was completest,—
His eyes of blue, like you, like you!—
So tender and deep and dark and true!
I love you because when he thinks of me
He sees me a-wearing of you, you see,
My precious old calico dress!

AT MY QUESTIONS THE STARS STARE UNCONCERNED.

At my questions the stars stare unconcerned;
Why look I without? I find within me
Enough to ensure man's eternity.
My cries rebound lifeless; the tears that burned
My cheeks in the night, they have only earned
Placid indifference. Surely deity
Would not so prostrate the highest I see,
Let fall to decay all my life has yearned?
Why look I without? I will lift my face,
Laugh smooth the deep furrows cut by my tears;
I'll question no more the color and sound,
The magnificent pomp of earth and space;
"Flesh of my flesh," born of doubt's endless years,
O God Within, I have sought Thee and found!

JOE HOOKER.

Only Democrat in the Second Ward,
That's what Joe Hooker was, scorned and abhorred
By us Republicans, boastful and free
Of inherited faith in the G. O. P.
In those fall days when Jim Blaine was run,
We were two hundred, Joe Hooker, one;
Now the Second Ward was called the toughest,
And the Sixth Grade boys were held the roughest
In that Kansas town. And who can deny that,
When they hanged Joe Hooker for a Democrat?

We had an old drum and a flag that fall,
And we'd march and march, and yell, and call
Cleveland the very worst names we could think!
Joe would stand by himself, and not blink
Nor grin while the big purrade filed past,
From the proud drum major to the very last
Little nigger who joyfully pranced.
But when the bell rang, and the mute files advanced,
And we dassant answer, he'd shout, "Who's afraid?
Hurrah fur Cleveland! Shoot sich a purrade!"

Then he'd swagger in, noisy and late,
And swipe his fist across his slate,—
None of the girls would lend him a rag!—
And do cube root, and make his brag
He "could lick any five Republican kids!"—
And other such big and deep-mouthed squids!
And then he'd set and grin and grin;—
It is a sin not to picture your grin,
And your wink, slow, subtle and fat,
Joe Hooker, you scoundrelly Democrat!

And Johnny Mohen, he was my bo, he said
Such an ornery Democrat ought to be dead!
And the very next time Joe guyed the purrade
The Two Hundred met, and my bo, he made
A speech,—he was drum major, you know;
And Ed Toler, he said we'd have to choke Joe
Off, and somebody said hangin' 'uld be
Good 'nuff, hang him on the cottonwood tree!
Oh we planned for you till the dark fell flat,
Joe Hooker, you scoundrelly Democrat!

It took a week to get things ready;
To convince the soft-hearted, steady
The weak-kneed, keep the girls from tellin',
Buy the rope and whoop up the yellin'!
And Joe got bolder and more sarcastic,
Tempting us daily to measures drastic;
Got so he'd run right through the purrade
Then beg our parding for the trouble he'd made!
Oh you were game, Joe Hooker, that's pat,—
Game for a scoundrelly Democrat!

Oh the times were stirring as times need be
When we hanged Joe Hooker on the cottonwood tree!
E'en the niggers were still when he dangled there,
His feet just touching the tossing hair
Of the chief hangman, for Joe was stout,
And the rope was thick, and he wouldn't shout
For Jim Blaine,—said he'd druther die...
As they thought he had, when he lay sort o' dry
And purple, spread out on the cinders and dirt.
But it was not you, Joe Hooker, who got worst hurt!

BORN IN NEW YORK.

Do you see that little woman in black
  With the weepy veil cascading her back?
Well sir, she was born in New York,—
  Born in New York,—
What do you think of that?

Born in New York!
  That strikes me as a fact 'bout as queer
As ever I've had sprung on me here,
  A-top of this bloomin' mundane sphere!
Born in New York!—New York!—
  Born in that pell-mell, banging,
Hustling, scrimmaging, clanging,
  Smoking, snorting, rushing,
Grafting, looting, crushing
    New York!

Now New York is all right enough,—
  Right enough to go mad in,
To get rich or drunk or bad in,
  All right for sin and tin and din;
Good to be married or buried in,
  Or hanged or divorced or murdered in,—
But to be *born* in—
  Born in New York!—
I declare that gets me!

"WITH EXACTNESS GRINDETH HE ALL."

"Goodnight and goodbye." Then silence closed in
And only the night was, and one clear star
Aloof, disdainful, so chaste and so far!

"Goodnight and goodbye." I stood quite alone
In the hush and pain and dearth of it all,
No help, no hope, no faith within call.

"Goodnight and goodbye" . . . when through the sad dark
A cry sprang of itself, if such things be,
"O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"

THE LITTLE CZAR.

"For, O, the hobby-horse is forgot!" Hamlet.

A little sailor laddie
  On the deck of his father's yacht,
Playing horse in the sunshine,
  A happy, winsome tot...
The Czarevitch, Alexis,
  Heir to ten thousand woes...
Up and down in the sunshine
  The fiery horsey goes;
The glistening waters foam from the prow
  Of the Russian Imperial yacht,
And the baby rides, and rides, and rides,
  A happy, bright-eyed tot.

Dear little sailor laddie,
  Do you hear those cries of woe?
How far they will sweep your father's throne
  No one, save God, can know;
But not a heart that beats to-day
  Clear in a human breast
But will ask Him with earnestness
  That clean your way be pressed;
Those dimpled hands be never raised
  In curse or cut or blow;
Never scatter, as free as light,
  Hunger and murder and woe!

I'd see you dead, dear baby,
  On the deck of your father's yacht,
Than seated on his blood-soaked throne,—
  The hobby-horse all forget!—

A terror of darkness brooding
That the blood drips, drips, drips through,
Your ears only keen to the counsel
Your Ministers clamor to you!
"Blood for blood" it is written
In the Hand that faltereth not,
Blood for blood must you answer
With the hobby-horse is forgot?

You were born a Czar, O laddie,
And if God's patience waiteth still,
As the commonest serf or peasant
Your birthright you must fulfill;
Not the kingliest hand ever stretched
Can save from your blood-bight throne;
Though the angels weep o'er you in heaven
Destiny knows but her own;
Dear little sailor laddie
On the Russian Imperial yacht,
God grant the storm be over-passed
E'er the hobby-horse is forgot!

"POOR TOM'S A-COLD!"

O to be nursed again in the lap of the legends old!
To feel the warmth of their ermine, the trailing weight of their gold!
To follow the saints, believing, all the long, blood-bruised way;
To lift wet eyes, beseeching, while tortured martyrs pray!
O to believe again in the things men felt and saw,
And wondered at and worshipped before they worshipped Law!

O to be nursed again in the lap of the legends old!
To feel the arms of the old-time faith shutting out the cold!
To see the world again with the eyes of the men who saw God;
To kiss again that tender Hand that holds the chastening rod!
O to be warm again in the things men felt and saw,
And wondered at and worshipped before they worshipped Law!

A VICARIOUS VACATION.

Vacation? I haven't been out of town,
  But I've had a traveled summer,
Meeting ten-day stop-overers,
  And greeting the grinning home-comer;
I've welcomed the tourists by dozens
  Ranged 'round our boarding-house table;
I've explained with care the nearest ways,
  And gone with 'em when I was able;
I've boomed the Library and the Zoo,
  And even the National Museum;
I've promised to write and send picture cards,
  And stop, *sure,* sometime, to see 'em;
Vacation? For me? You're dreaming;
  I've been in the District all summer
Hobnobbing with The Tourist,
  And greeting the grinning home-comer!

Vacation? I've had mine by proxy,
  Listening to travelers' yarns;
Smiling when tired sight-seers
  Held forth on their home consarns;
I've discussed the Washington climate
  With people from every state;
Compared it with climates cold and hot,
  Moist, arid, and duplicate;
I know what tourists' tickets cost
  From 'most everywhere to here;
I've met a hundred folks, I 'spose,
  Who've wept on Washington's bier;
Vacation? Why, yes, yes indeed,
  I've had the liveliest summer
Entertaining "our Jamestown guests,"
  And greeting the grinning home-comer!

Vacation? I've got so traveled
I talk like a Standard Guide;
I handle dates and facts and such
With a Megaphone Man's own pride;
It hasn't cost me a single cent,—
Didn't even have to pack;
I sat at the head of the table,
And went, and saw, and got back;
No fuss, no baggage, no new clothes,
No haste nor smoke nor car dirt;
Just "an intelligent tourist"
Talking from soup to desert!
Vacation? I've traveled enough
To cover a dozen summers,
Meeting ten-day stop-overers,
And greeting grinning home-comers!

A TRYST.

The straw-colored light filters from the sun;
Through the mellow haze little quivers run
As if some great sleeping god had begun
To stir and stretch at the deep roots of things;
Somewhere in my breast tiny brilliant wings
Flutter and quiet and flutter and rest...
Old, old thoughts—
Old thoughts are tenderest.

In the dim-dreaming light I wait alone,
Lean my arms on this crumbling arch of stone
And 'round me the past makes echoing moan...
I start and look up; his firm step rings clear
Down the old rock road; my lover is here;
"Sweetheart!" he cries, still far, "My own home-rest!"
Old, old thoughts—
Old thoughts are tenderest.

BRIDE ROSES.

Bride roses for me—for me?
  No, no, not for me, Dear Heart;
In their fresh brave new beauty
  I know I have no least part.
Bride roses...They were the kind
  We laid upon her dead breast,
And though they are ashes now,
  My own bride roses are best.
Forgive if I turn away
  Nor kiss warm your gifts so fair;
All of my love for roses
  Lies hid in those ashes there.

THE BUILDERS.

All day I've been "planning and toiling
In the crowded hives of men;"
All day I've been "building and spoiling,
And spoiling and building again;"
But my fancy fled on the sunshine
To the haunts that our childhood knew;
Again in the shade of the Lakeside woods
We walked where the violets grew;
And deep in the sand by the river
You planned a great castle with towers...
I've been helping you buttress its mighty walls
For hours and hours and hours,—
All day, Sister, all day.

All day we have toiled, as children will,
Building houses and towns in the sand;
Parcelling out, with princely ease,
Broad demesnes of shining land;
The violets we gathered drooped wan,
Pale aliens to royal pride,
And rival kings' brave palaces
Stood in the sunshine, side by side;
Your brown hands plowed through the sliding sands
As you planned a great castle with towers...
I've been helping you buttress its mighty walls
For hours and hours and hours,—
All day, Sister, all day.

The things I have wrought in my sad womanhood
Far away from the banks of that river,
I would give them all for one castle of sand
Though it caved the next instant forever;

To see your brown hands in the sliding sands,
  Your eyes speaking caution above them;
The violets a-droop in the king's gardens
  Dying because you so love them...
All day my heart has broken for you,
  For your voice, and your castle with towers...
I've been helping you buttress its mighty walls
  For hours and hours and hours,—
    All day, Sister, all day.

TOSTI.

The jeweled fans ceased to flutter
And the rose-ladened air was still
As his strong voice rang above us
With the poet's pain a-thrill;
"I dream of the rose you gave me,
I think of our last farewell,
I dream of the silent longing
That only the heart can tell."

At ease I sat by my new love's side,
The roses' blooming a lie,
The brilliant scene around us
A thing to conjure hell by;
For in my soul's lost heaven
Another clear singing rang;
Around my soul's dismantled throne
To myriad life it sprang.

At ease I sat by my new love's side
And smiled when the song was done,
But the tears that splotched the program's face
By another singer were won.

CLOVER.

If an angel to-night, all kindness and light,
  Came and stood by that bunch of clover,
Gathered to-day, thinking of love
  And June and the past and my lover;—
If an angel, I say,
  Should stand in this room,
Enwrapped in the bloom,
  And tell me I'd die
Ere the light in the sky
  Encrimsoned another day;
If, tall and straight, he stood just there,
  Just there by the red, red clover,
And told me to take what I wanted most
  From a life now closed and over,
I'd ask to hear your voice, my dear,
  As it came to me over the clover
One perfect day when sweet June lay
  Like a memory the heart bleeds over;
I could go the dark way from the garish day
  That leads to the grave—and over,
If I had your warm voice around me close,—
  Your voice and the scent of the clover!

"CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN."

The gray dawn rose,
  A spectre, from out the grayer night;
The gray land lay,
  A silence, beyond the blur of light;

The gray sea spread,
  A menace, slow heavings of liquid stone;
The sky hung down,
  A burden, pallid and leaden and lone;

From out the fog,
  A warning, faint bells rang dim and slow,
And on the decks
  The sailors like shrouded shapes did go;

Our brave ship stood,
  A sentinel, listening the long day,
And round her , cold,
  The torpid sea in sullen silence lay.

So still it was
  Our voices seemed to flare up in God's face;
The gray about
  Hung close and wet, and death-damped every place;

But no fears stirred
  As we watched the dank mists fold and crawl;
No face went white
  When sudden ships loomed black and ghost and tall;

No prayer trembled,
A pleading, through the gaunt void, gloom and ghast,
For 'round our hope,
Our Captain, our cabled faiths were cast.

ENVOY.

Captain, oh my Captain,
Your eyes read well the heapéd gray,
And we leaned hard on your strong heart
All that long, silent day.

Captain, oh my Captain,
I kiss your guiding hand,
And your clear eyes that through the gray
Saw straight to the good brown land!

Let others sing the courage
Of the crimson charge and fray;
I sing you, oh my Captain,
In that idle, silent gray!

CITY TWILIGHT.

Back of our street, which is clean
  And silent and spacious and gloomy,
Is a dirty, noisy street,
  Not aristocratic nor roomy,
The houses all tumbledown,
  But O, the fun they have on that street!
Fights, jigs, jokes, shootings and craps,
  The smell of suds and frying meat;
Everybody going somewhere
  Or just coming back from having been,
Borrowing, bawling, haggling,
  Poor as poverty, healthy as sin!
But the clamor falls and stops,
  And the longest-winded dancer drops
On the curb, stilled and awed,
  And they all hum low, "Nearer, my Gawd
    To Thee, Nearer to Thee,"
      When the hurdy-gurdy plays 'round the corner.

In our broad street we don't care,
  But in *that* street, how they love it,
As they idle in the twilight
  And their bad tobacco floats above it!
And the frivolous grinding
  Brings to me, with its merry tilt and jar,
A presence of white silence,
  The odor of lilies, sweet and far,
A tall man reading a book,
  "I am the Resurrection and the Life,"—
Tears seem to be falling...mine
  On my hands here—why, my tears are rife!

For the clamor falls and stops,
And the longest-winded dancer drops
On the curb, stilled and awed,
And my heart joins low, "Nearer, my Gawd
To Thee, Nearer to Thee,"
When the hurdy-gurdy plays 'round the corner.

"THE IMAGE OF THE EARTHY."

"The careless crime of an unknown man."—The Ring and the Book.

A single cab at the open gate;
  A man with an oblong box of brown
On the steps of The Home for the Friendless,
  On the outskirts of the town;
The funeral of "the baby
  That died last night," I'm told;
The doctor bangs the carriage door
  To shut out the wide white cold,
Then he and the sad-faced Matron
  And "the baby that died last night"
Drive down the frozen road in state,
  As any "rich" dead child might;
Only—for *some* dead babies
  Gushing tears are a birthright.

The mother? She's in New York;
  Your finger on lip about *her;*
In honor to this pure waif-soul
  Let pass the deservéd slur.
And here is her baby buried
  From The Home for the Friendless there;
Hired hands giving the service,
  Hired hearts taking the care;
Two years old and under,
  Never a strong child, they say;
Nobody ever "inquired" for it,
  Or left toys, gaud and gay;
Poor little lonely baby!—
  And New York some seventy miles away!

Two years old and under;
  Now, a grave in the warm white snow,
Warmer by far than the mother breast
  This baby was never to know.
Two years old and under,
  Brief sign of a passion whim...
The father?—Now I wonder
  If God has kept track of *him?*

ONE ONLY PRAYER.

If all the gods in all the worlds
  Should crowd thick and close around me,
And ask me what I'd rather have,
  Or lose or get or be;
If all the gods in all the worlds
  Should bring all the gifts to me,
And bid me take what I wanted most
  Of the beautiful things I see;
Only one prayer I'd make:
  "This, dear Gods, this;
Give me to know when I'm boring others,
  And others to know when they're boring me!"

SPEECH IN SILVER.

I wish I had words to say
  How intensely I hate this thing;
But it broods, broods black in my heart
  And I cannot give it wing;
Some gaunt Tradition I've cast off,
  Doubtless, dim shadows my will;—
Dulls the clear soulsight that else
  Its utmost reach might fulfill.

Do you know the hate that hammers,
  Hammers like hell-strokes in your heart?—
Or shoves like ice through your scared veins
  Till you stand, enmarbled, apart?
If you know the passion of hate
  And the flaccid woe it can bring,
You understand there are no words
  To picture real hate of a thing.

Of this particular hate
  I've said not a word,—not a word;
But I've thought hate so loud I know
  That the very heavens have heard;
I've sickened, and turned away,
  Or smiled, and bit back the mad tears,
But now I'm going to speak of it,
  And avenge these sleuth-shadowed years.

To see a woman with white hair
  Carry a muff dog in her arms,—
One of those rags from the dog world
  That wield such appalling charms!—

To see her fondle and kiss it,
  Crooning babe-words, lisp and sweet,—
God, this is what sane men and women
  Have to bear on the open street!

White hair, mind you; life's beautiful sign
  That Wisdom has garnered her own,
And parts the essential from the vain
  On her gracious and gilded throne;
To see a woman with white hair
  Mistake what God meant by a child—
I have often turned from *that* spectacle
  Feeling my humanhood defiled!

AN ALIEN I WALK.

An alien I walk under alien trees,
Cottonwoods here in the East;
Hungry, I reach empty hands and cry,
Chained fast in sight of the feast;
The cottonwoods lulled my childhood to sleep,
But these do not seem the same;
An alien I walk under alien trees,
Cottonwoods only in name.

A HEALTH.

A stretch of land:
The green of the corn, the gold of the wheat;
Long yellow roads, like ribbons between,
Threading the mazes of gold and of green,
And happy bees
And birds in trees
Singing of joy and of June;
And violets blue
And clovers, too,
And sunflowers nodding in tune!
Mines and caverns, tombs and graves;
Mosques and prisons, marts and caves;
Monuments towering of marble and brass;—
Things that glitter and please ... and pass;
Things men build and hope on and sigh for,
All the glitter and fritter they die for;—
The purple pomp, the funeral pall,
The statesmen's voice, the martyr's call;
Cottage and capitol, hovel and hall,
Bridge and palace, temple and tower,
Man in his weakness, man in his power;
Roads of steel, roads of dirt,
The merchant, the prophet, the cheat, the flirt,—
Sounds and odors and passions,
Colors and hopes and sins,—
A stretch of land.

A stretch of sea:
A gleaming gull slow floating by,
Nor land nor sound nor God is nigh,
Only sea, a stretch of sea.
Whispering low like lovers at twilight,
Thundering loud like storm clouds at midnight,

Caressing and tender, so gentle and true,
The sea in the morning, all sparkling and blue;
Hating and cruel, self-roused in his ire,
The sea at deep midnight, all tempest and fire;
A slave to his passions,
A master of hate,
Wrecking his will,
Or early or late;
Wrecking his will on living and dead,
Bearing the living on shoulders of state,
Despoiling the dead in implacable hate;
On his broad breast, the living,
In his wide bosom, the dead;
Guiding the living till his wrath burst in storm,
Hiding the dead till Eternity's morn,
Vast, unexplored, trackless,
Man's glory and doom,
His poem, his passion, his love and his tomb,—
A stretch of sea.

A stretch of land and a stretch of sea,
And this is the world for you and me;
And here men weep
And toil and sleep
And joy and hope and wait,
And here they build and love and die,
Under an equal sun,
Under an equal sky;
The boundless land, the infinite sea,
This is the world for you and me;
Though we wander far,—for the land is wide,
Though we drift alone, 'mid ebb and tide,
And stumble and fall,
And sink and call,
It cannot be evil with you and me,
'Tis a boundless land and an infinite sea!

Which shall it be, the land, the sea,
For you? For me?
The good brown land, with its mountains high,
The good blue sea, with its infinite sky,
Whichever it be,
The land, the sea,
Here's a health and good luck to you and me!

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